

THE PICK OF THE 2002 CROP CIRCLE SEASON

After a slow start in England, the 2002 circle season sprang the phenomenon's usual surprises, including a mysterious image of an ET holding out an inscribed disc.

by Andy Thomas © 2002

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In the traditional British heartlands of the crop circle phenomenon following a year of foot and mouth disease, hoax paranoia and then two stunning circular events at Milk Hill and Chilbolton which cleared the air somewhat, the 2002 season promised a much cleaner slate.

Yet it looked for a while like nothing was going to happen at all. Events began very slowly—the slowest for several years—with a modest, ringed circle in a rape crop at Soberton, Hampshire, on 12 April. It then took a long while to get going before the masterpieces the UK was used to seeing returned, with only three minor formations reported in May. Events began properly at Avebury Trusloe, Wiltshire, on 2 June, with an attractive Celtic-looking design resembling a sixfold knotted string within a ring of beads.

Though progression was slow, there was a scattering of other noted formations throughout June. One was a beautiful double spiral at West Overton, Wiltshire, on 23 June, whilst the county of West Sussex also delivered some fine patterns. One of two formations at Sompting was a convex triangle design found (by myself and Allan Brown) to contain a thick but fine white dust deposited inside. When Rodney Ashby (as recommended by Nancy Talbott of BLT Research) analysed the dust, he found it to be a particularly pure form of silica, very unlikely to be found in a field. No explanation could be found for its presence, but Nancy later revealed that such dust has recently been found in other formations around the world.

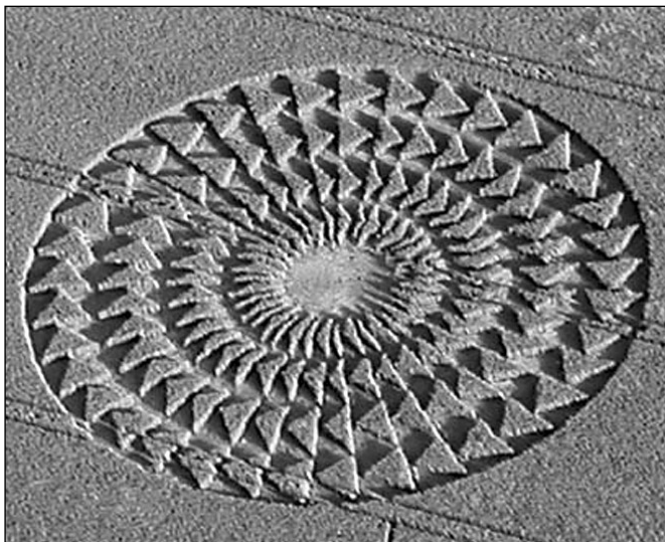
Despite these offerings, it wasn't really until July that the UK scene came properly to life, finally delivering the numbers and array of ingenuity expected for the time of year. But then, what are the expectations with the crop circles, which always seem to confound predictions and complacency?

It has now become traditional to await the arrival of the hugest formation of the year as some kind of "grand finale", as with the astonishing 800-foot Milk Hill spiral of the preceding year, but in 2002 the largest-diameter formation (at least at the time of writing, in late August) arrived on 4 July near Stonehenge, Wiltshire. It was a wonderful 741-foot design, resembling six ribbons three-dimensionally fluttering in the wind. What impressed as much as its shape (actually, made from very straightforward curves) was its positioning within the field, poised perfectly between three round barrows and the perimeter of the field, with little margin for error. Michael Glickman likened the task to "lowering an oil tanker into Trafalgar Square".

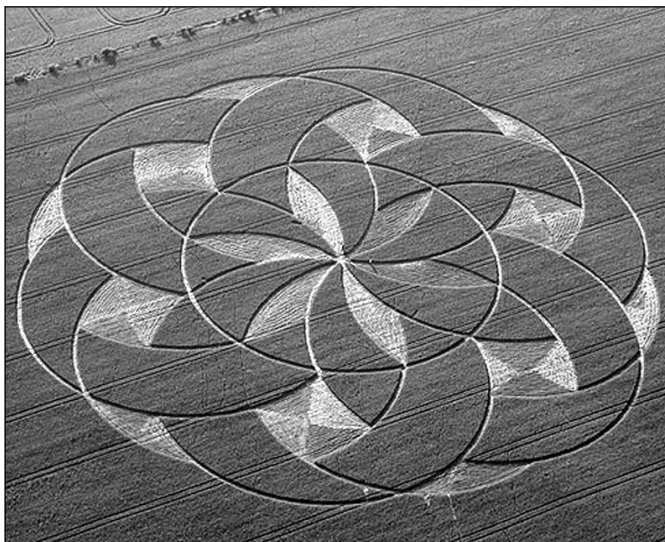
This was the first formation of the year to catch the attention of the British media, and it found its way into newspapers and television reports to a suitably impressed public. But the UK is already well conditioned to the presence of crop circles. In the USA, many were discovering the phenomenon for the very first time—perhaps incredibly to British eyes—thanks to one particular film...

August 2002 saw the US release of the movie *Signs*, starring Mel Gibson—a spooky UFO-invasion thriller in which tall green aliens create formations in maize crops as landing beacons for their craft. Putting aside the unoriginality of the plot and the portrayal of the crop circles as something so disappointingly mundane, the fact is that the movie raised the profile of the real phenomenon to a huge degree, bringing it to the attention of many Americans whom it had somehow previously bypassed. Magazines and newspapers swelled with articles and the airwaves buzzed with radio and television documentaries, news features and phone-ins on crop circles as if they had never existed before.

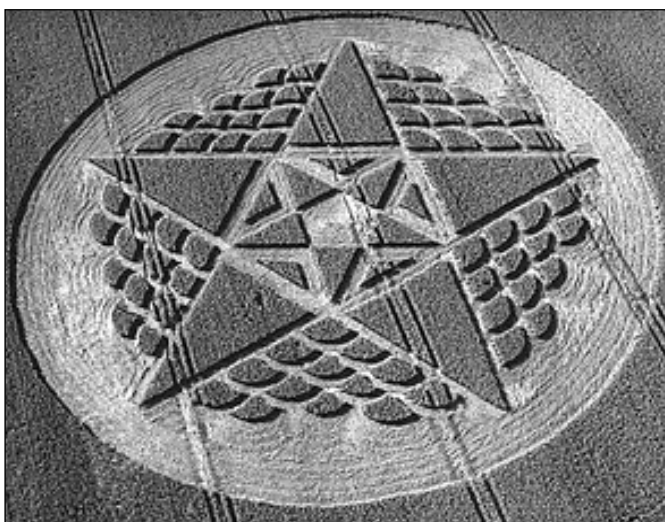
It's interesting to note that most US "croppies" were deeply unimpressed with the film, many considering it a fear-mongering distortion of the true phenomenon, but those new to



Windmill Hill, near Avebury, Wiltshire. Reported 2nd August.
Image M. J. Fussell © 2002



Nursted, near Devizes, Wiltshire. Reported 11th August.
Image M. J. Fussell © 2002



Beckhampton, near Avebury, Wiltshire. Reported 26th August.
Image M. J. Fussell © 2002

the concept of the circles in any light suddenly became exposed to the existence of the real thing. Cereological interest from the States became intense, and circle websites saw the effect as hit-rates rapidly increased.

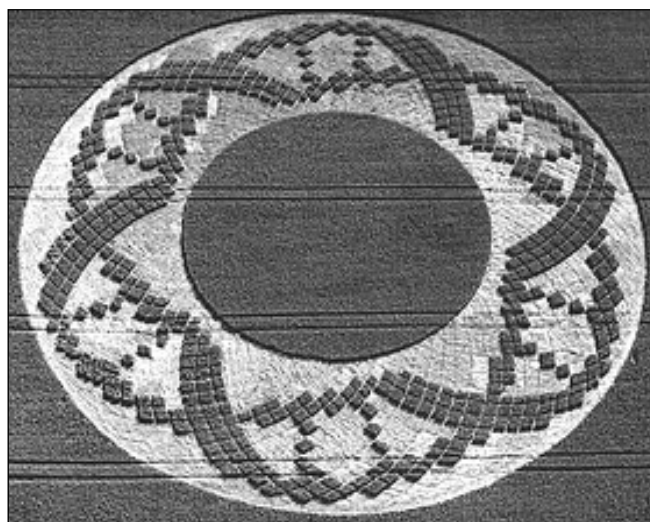
A positive documentary movie, *Crop Circles: Quest For Truth*, by award-winning US filmmaker William Gazecki, was planned for release in late [northern] summer, too, to set straight any Hollywood misconceptions about the real phenomenon. A 45-minute excerpt was premiered at this year's Glastonbury Symposium crop circle conference (in its new, bigger venue) and was well received.

With all this newfound interest, there was a suspicious rise in the number of US formations, though those who believe the phenomenon to be psychically interactive defended this development as inevitable and positive.

The debunkers were also on hand to capitalise on the newfound interest. As the movie-inspired circle coverage increased, their claims that all crop circles are man-made became more prominent, as spokespersons for the rather sinister Inquisition-like elite organisation CSICOP (Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal) found louder voices, and the usual human circle-making teams found new platforms from which to dispense their scepticism. One thing the film does not do is debunk the circles—which would have been a dramatic let-down. So the sceptics have had to find even louder voices this year, with probably a major debunking still on its way at the time of writing, courtesy of a conglomeration of known UK human circle-makers promising something spectacular, probably timed to coincide with the UK release of *Signs* in September.

Elsewhere in the world, aside from Hollywood's intervention, crop circles increased their profile in a number of places—notably Germany, which, for a time until July, had more crop circles than the UK, with a series of intriguing if less ambitious designs, some of which utilised more unusual crops than the routine grain-types. A formation on the Isle of Ruegen at Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, for instance, appeared in a field of white clover and purple phacelia flowers, creating a rather beautiful effect. Canada also continued its increased sightings, and The Netherlands was again a contender in the numbers stakes.

But by the middle of August, the UK had caught up from its late start and was producing some extraordinary patterns, though some feared a deliberate increase in man-made formations as a result of



Crooked Soley, nr Hungerford, Berkshire. Reported 28th August
Image M. J. Fussell © 2002

the extra publicity from *Signs*, which was less acute in the UK but still noticeable.

One or two formations this year surprised by being overtly pictorial in their nature—such as the one which appeared at Alton Barnes on 15 July and appeared to resemble an apple tree, or a mushroom if turned upside down. Later, on 14 August in the same field, another dramatic emblem depicted two stylised dolphins leaping around a triple-ringed circle. A few saw this as a beautiful, but cautioning, representation of the negative effects of sonar on these aquatic creatures. Some were not happy with such unambiguous designs, but the mother of pictorial formations was to upset things further...

On 15 August, a year and a day on from the amazing Chilbolton "face" and "message" formations which confounded the circle community in 2001, another representation of a face—this time almost certainly a classic-looking "ET", complete with shoulders and chest—arrived at Crabwood, near Winchester, Hampshire, just a few miles from Chilbolton. Instead of an accompanying radio telescope, this time a microwave transmitter complex stood nearby; and instead of the separate play on the message we beamed out into space in 1974, as embodied in last year's "code", this time a large spiral disc of small rectangular dots and dashes was superimposed over the corner of the ET illustration, clearly containing digital information.

The first attempts at decoding the disc as ASCII text code came through quickly. The message appears to read as follows, written exactly as it translates:

"Beware the bearers of FALSE gifts & their BROKEN PROMISES. Much PAIN but still time. EELIJ?E [this word is damaged and unclear, but some say it may be meant to read "BELIEVE"']. THERE IS GOOD OUT THERE. We OPpose DECEPTION. Conduit CLOSING." (A bell sound is then signified.)

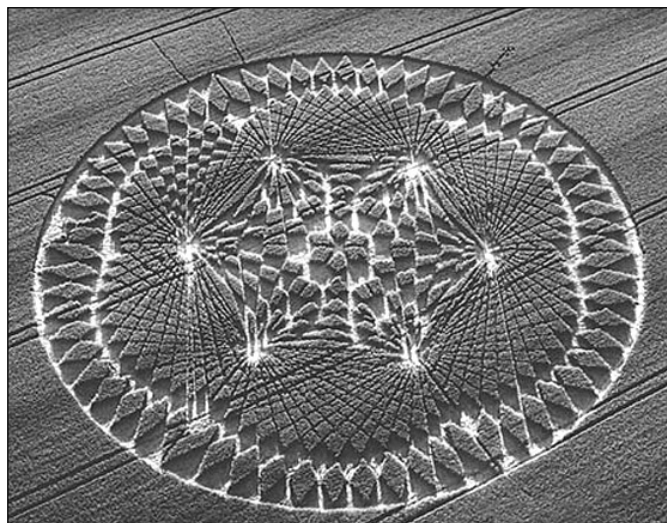
Perhaps with the thought of "false gifts" in mind, opinion was divided over the nature of the symbolism, being just too overt for some people. Some found the ET creepy and threatening, while others thought it had a playful, mischievous nature. Some felt this was another agency at work altogether from the usual circlemaking forces, and inevitably many others were highly dubious as to its authenticity, especially with all the attendant *Signs* fuss. Yet its construction was ingenious. Instead of half-tone dots, as found at Chilbolton in 2001, this face and body were formed from thin



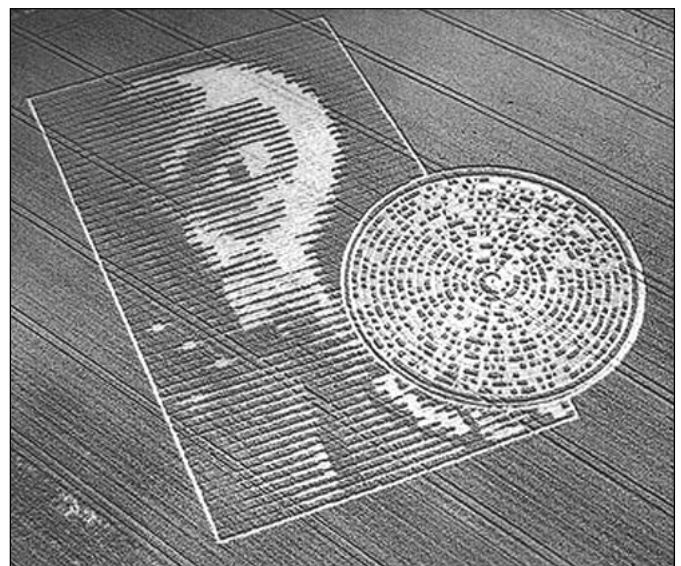
East Field, near Alton Barnes, Wiltshire. Reported 14th August. Image M. J. Fussell © 2002



Pewsey White Horse, near Pewsey, Wiltshire. Reported 17th July. Image Steve Alexander © 2002



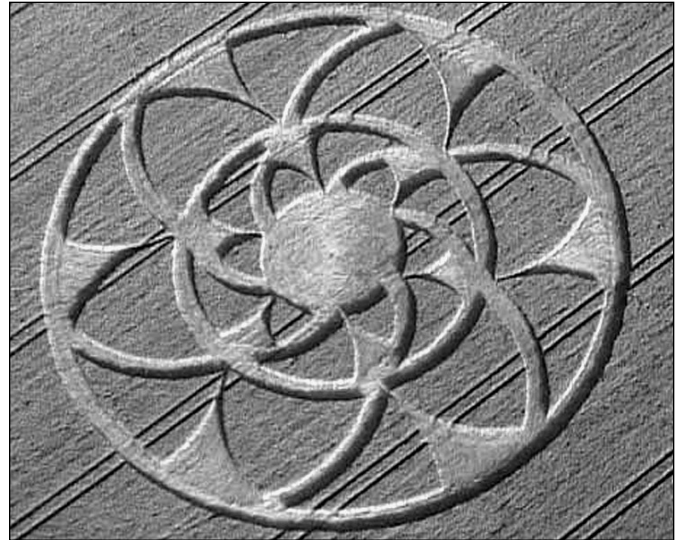
Windmill Hill, near Avebury, Wiltshire. Reported 18th July. Image Steve Alexander © 2002



Crabwood Farm House, near Winchester, Hampshire. Reported 15th August. Image Steve Alexander © 2002
The circular ASCII code has been translated to read: "Beware the bearers of FALSE gifts & their BROKEN PROMISES. Much PAIN but still time. BELIEVE. THERE IS GOOD OUT THERE. We OPpose DECEPTION. Conduit CLOSING."



South Field, near Alton Priors, Wiltshire. Reported 22nd July.
Image Steve Alexander © 2002



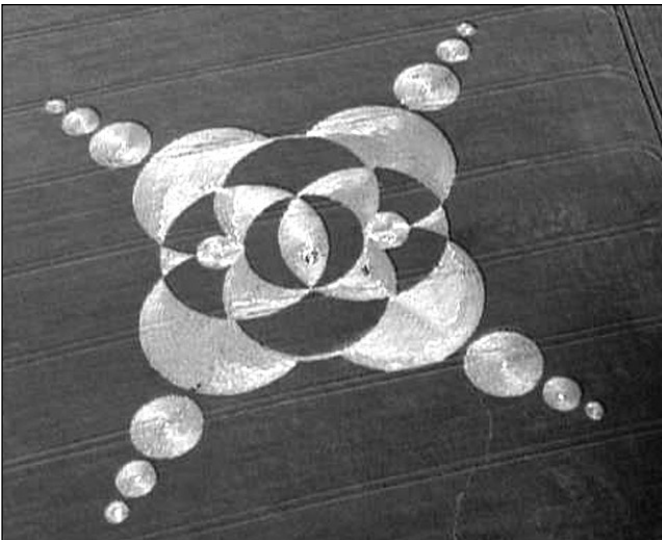
Barbury Castle, near Wroughton, Wiltshire. Reported 24th July.
Image Stuart Dike © 2002



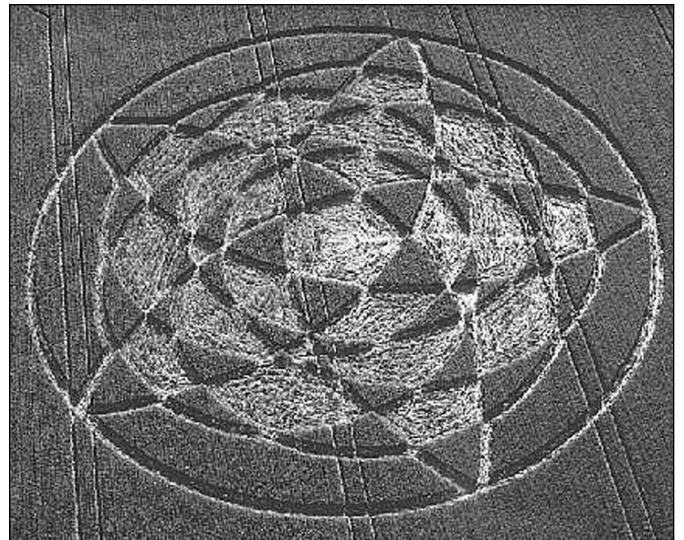
Telegraph Hill, Lilley, near Luton, Hertfordshire. Reported 1st June.
Image Russell Stannard © 2002



Avebury Trusloe, nr Beckhampton, Wiltshire. Reported 2nd June.
Image Steve Alexander © 2002



Silbury Hill, near Avebury, Wiltshire. Reported 4th June.
Image Stuart Dike © 2002



Avebury Stone Circle, near Avebury, Wiltshire. Reported 21st June.
Image Steve Alexander © 2002

scanning lines, widening at different intervals to create the pattern. Ground observation was meaningless without an aerial visual reference. The debates will doubtless continue for a long time.

As I write, there is a hope for perhaps one more "biggie" to come, aside from any glitzy but hollow distractions human circlemakers may create for PR purposes. However, the astonishing formation which appeared on 28 August at Crooked Soley, near Hungerford in Wiltshire, may well have been the grand finale: a wide ring with a DNA-type spiral of blocks running through it in a 3D mosaic fashion. Its geometric construction is remarkable and its implications are intriguing, if unsettling.

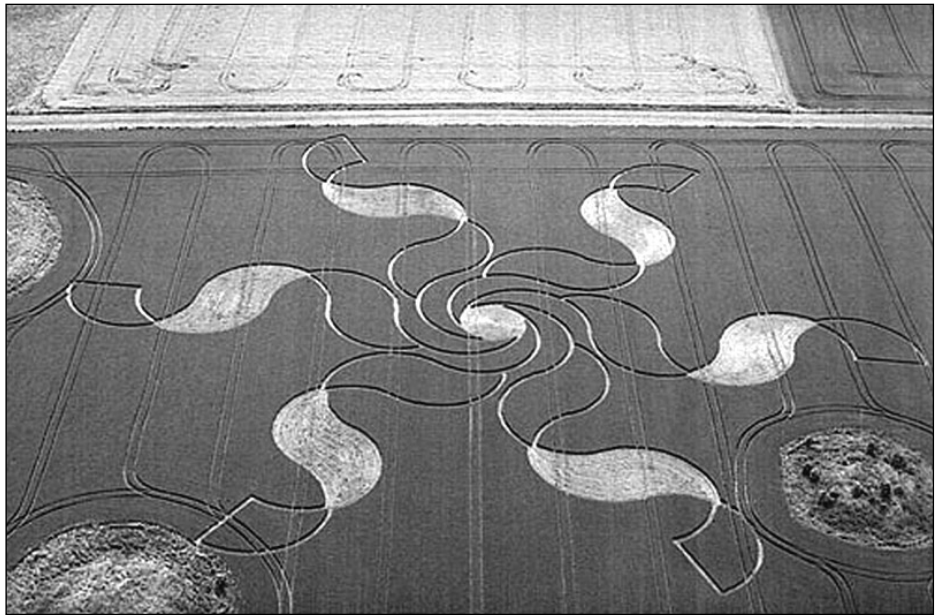
Now the fields are rapidly falling to the harvesters, closing a curious season marked more by new attention to the phenomenon than any overtly new behaviour from it, with the obvious exceptions.

Whether by next year, especially when the debunkers have finished their work, the crop circles will be seen as "last year's" faded fad remains to be seen, but many will celebrate the year in which attention—even if the Hollywood trigger for it was essentially superficial—was drawn in a big way once again to the ever-continuing mystery in the fields.

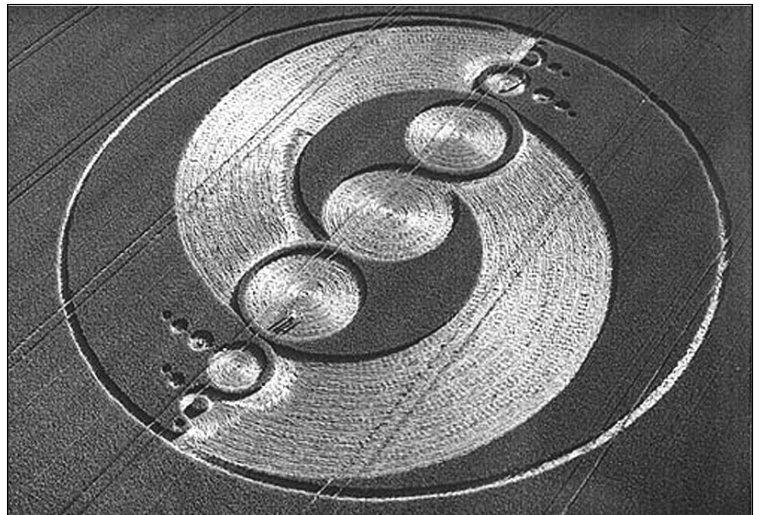
About the Author:

Andy Thomas is author of *Vital Signs: A Complete Guide to the Crop Circle Mystery and Why it is NOT a Hoax* (see review this issue), and editor of the Swirled News website, www.swirlednews.com.

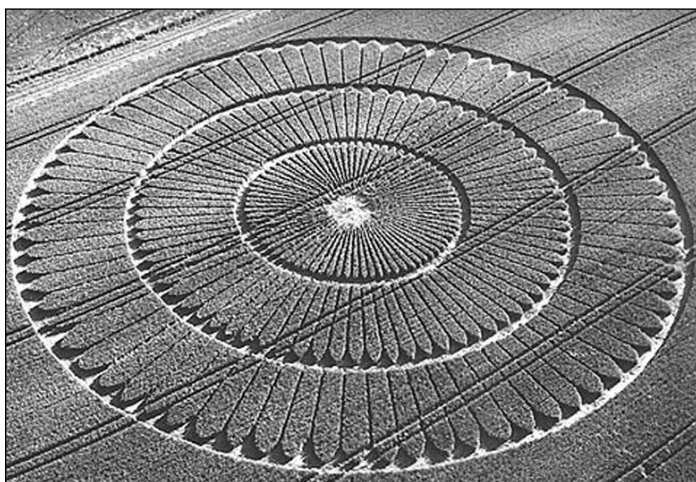
Special thanks to the folks at www.CropCircleConnector.com and to Steve Alexander at www.temporarytemples.co.uk/



Normanton Down Long Barrows, near Stonehenge, Wiltshire. Reported 4th July. Image Steve Alexander © 2002



Avebury Stone Circle, near Avebury, Wiltshire. Reported 28th July. Image Steve Alexander © 2002



The Gallops, nr Beckhampton, Wiltshire. Reported 28th July. Image Steve Alexander © 2002



North Farm, nr West Overton, Wiltshire. Reported 23rd June. Image Steve Alexander © 2002